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L'Univers De Georges

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Abstract

The sun slipped behind the last row of low, brick huts and left the world in a warm, gray twilight...



L'Univers De Georges

By Barbara Buchwald

THE SUN slipped behind the last row of low, brick huts and left the world in a warm, gray twilight. In the factory, which made stained glass windows, there was only the faintest light of the sun and the glowing embers of the fire left to flicker and dance on the deep luminescent panes of the half-finished windows and on the bits of glass scattered about on the long benches about the room. Lighted now and then by bits of color, a small boy sat pensively waiting, his eyes cat-like and motionless.

To Georges Malreaux, one year an apprentice at the factory, in this time of day between the half-light and the darkness, the room seemed like a great, translucent bottle and he was inside looking out, or outside looking in. He was never sure just which way it was.

Then the last twilight vanished before the fog and only the brilliant lights were left flickering from the coals, swaying, weaving, finding still more panes of rich glass and giving rise to polychrome nymphs, indigo, violet, gold and sapphire. And these became the people of Georges Malreaux's world.

Each night they came before him, bearing their agony

in lucid silence. First the old king, in his rich, purple robe, caught in a web of power of his own making. His face was lined with suffering, foreseeing the many epochs it would take before the evil he had made was undone — and there being so little time left on earth. As a last shred of humanity, he had, in one gnarled hand, a bunch of violets, lifting their petals always upward to the sun.

Then came the tragic prostitutes, one taller than the others. In their eyes, as lost as a memory, was a reflection of what they once had been. Their long, red dresses deepened and turned to black.

Last came the sad-faced clowns, lost forever in their world of fantasy. They laughed and brittle, red lights shimmered through the room, but all the while, great blue tears stained their sweet faces. They spoke to Georges in colors, and he saw and understood.

The room once more was quiet and only the lights remained reflected from the dying embers, flickering, weaving — red, green and blue. Georges took into his hands some small pieces of glass and began to fashion, through the night, a butterfly.

Georges was wrenched up from the corner and slapped painfully by a coarse hand. "Stupid, lazy, good-for-nothing! Sleep until noon while the fire lies as cold as the grave." He opened his eyes to a blaze of sunlight and to the piercing eyes of his master. "Take your things and get out. Mother of God, what have I done to be plagued so by this devil?"

And for a moment the master stopped, his attention called to the floor by two radiant wings. He took half a step and crushed them beneath the heel of his boot. Georges slipped out into the street.

At last, when he could run no more, he flung himself in the refuse of a narrow, dingy street and wept in rage and humility. Behind him, gay young women passed in stockings, holding tightly to the arms of virile men. Sometimes they shouted to him, and he looked up. "Come fellow, and drink with us." But when they saw his wretched, young face, they only laughed and went on.

It was the same wherever he went. They saw his wretched face and saw his people in his eyes. And always they laughed, and Georges knew that they would keep laughing until he

was free. When he walked in the crowd, he pulled his collar high about his ears and buried his face in its folds.

Once his foot struck something hard and he saw a small piece of coal in the dust. He took it into his hand, rubbing the black dust between his fingers. Without thinking, he began to sketch on the smooth wall of a hut. And the sketch grew and took form and before his eyes it began to breathe and live. It was a sad-faced clown looking out at him in mute betrayal. There was no laughter, only great, blue tears.

Georges threw the coal and it rolled into the shadows. He closed his eyes and there inside were the shimmering people, the luminous people, the gleaming, glorious, blazing people. They screamed to him from their prison, to paint them in the blazing colors that made them alive. He must set them free.

George Malreaux's shoulders began to sag, on that day, with their burden. From somewhere he saw beams of hard, clown laughter and he was inside the bottle with his nose pressed flat against the glass.

